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# HISTORY AND PRESERVATION OF MOUNT VERNON

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THOMAS NELSON PAGE

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*East Front of Mansion*

*Frontispiece*

# MOUNT VERNON

AND ITS

# PRESERVATION

1858–1910

*The Acquisition, Restoration, and Care of the Home of Washington by the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union for over half a Century*

THOMAS NELSON PAGE

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The Knickerbocker Press, New York

# Mount Vernon

## Introduction

ON the western bank of the Potomac River, about a score of miles below the Capital of the Nation, rises a high bluff, crowned by an old Virginia mansion of equal dignity and simplicity, surrounded by grounds filled with noble trees and flanked by the customary out-buildings of an old Virginia plantation of the better sort. To the eye of the wayfarer, it would, even were its history unknown, appear, seated as it is, embowered in trees, a haven of rest for those buffeted by the storms of the outer world. For this is Mount Ver-

non, the home of Washington, the last resting place of his sacred ashes, a shrine for all lovers of liberty of every clime and every age.

A brief history of the estate, associated as it is with the home life of Washington, cannot but prove interesting, for here Washington spent most of his boyhood and youth, under the roof of his half-brother, Lawrence, whose early distinction under the gallant Admiral Vernon, kindled in the lad's mind the martial spark, which in the sequel led to those victories by which was established this Republic. Here, after he reached manhood, he pondered those great questions which his wisdom and character did so much to solve. Hence, relinquishing a life of ease and luxury, he went forth to fight the battles of his country. Here

he returned after long absences to refresh his spirit in its deep tranquillity —a tranquillity which he relinquished at the call of his countrymen to guide the destinies of his Country and set her in the way of peace and of liberty. And here, greater than Cæsar, greater than Cromwell, greater than Napoleon, he retired, the first man in the world, to spend the brief evening of his life, an example for all mankind to emulate.

G. Washington

Painting by Gilbert Stuart, called the Gibbs-Channing-Avery portrait, deposited in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

From "A History of the United States and Its People," by Elroy McKendree Avery, by special arrangement with the Burrows Brothers Company, Publishers, Cleveland

At the Council of the Board of Regents of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union, held at Mount Vernon in May, 1910, the following Resolution was adopted:

"*Resolved*, the Council having approved and accepted the admirable paper entitled 'Mount Vernon and its Preservation,' written by DOCTOR THOMAS NELSON PAGE, the same having come to the Council with the compliments of Doctor Page, we now extend to him our keen appreciation of the gift and hearty thanks for it, giving, as the article does, a full and accurate account of Mount Vernon, its history, and its acquisition for the Ladies' Association, which has held and preserved it for over half a century."

MARTHA WASHINGTON

Painting by Gilbert Stuart (considered the best likeness), owned by the Boston Athenæum and deposited in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

From "A History of the United States and It's People" by Elroy McKendree Avery, by special arrangement with The Burrows Brothers Company, Publishers, Cleveland

"Ladies, the home of Washington is in your charge; see to it that you keep it the home of Washington. Let no irreverent hand change it; no vandal hands desecrate it with the finger of progress. Those who go to the home in which he lived and died, wish to see in what he lived and died. Let one spot in this grand country of ours be saved from change. Upon you rests this duty."

(ANN PARMELE CUNNINGHAM.)

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## Mount Vernon and Its Preservation

THE history of Mount Vernon, properly presented, should be one of the most interesting stories that could be written, and, however presented, associated as the place is with the home life of Washington, and as the repository of his sacred ashes, it cannot but prove interesting. Whatever his accomplishment in his mighty career, whatever the fruitage, of which the world has been partaker, here was the garden where his powers sprang, here the soil in which they reached their complete vigor and ripeness, and here by his desire, at his death his sacred ashes were laid.

It may be well at the start, for a complete understanding of the present condition of the place, to trace the title to the estate, down to the hands of its present owners and faithful guardians.

The title to Mount Vernon is, like many of the old Virginia titles, an easy one to trace, for even where written records fail, as sometimes they do through carelessness or destruction by war, the title has generally passed through few hands, and has remained in the same family for so many generations as to be a part of the known history of the family.

Mount Vernon was a part of that great tract known in Virginia history as the Northern Neck, comprised between the Potomac and the Rappahannock rivers, which Charles II. in his heedlessness undertook to grant to his

favorites, Lords Culpeper and Arlington. Virginia, ever jealous of her rights, threatened to flame into revolution over the high-handed act of the thoughtless King, so that the larger portion of the grant was withdrawn; but it appears that this portion of it continued, or, at least, the color of title to it continued in Lord Culpeper, for we find in the beginning of the chain of title:

1. A grant from Lord Culpeper to Nicholas Spenser and John Washington, in 1674. Thus, the Washingtons derived title straight from the grantee of the Crown.

2. We find on record in the Land Office of Virginia, in Richmond, a grant from George H. Jeffreys to Nicholas Spenser and John Washington for 5000 acres of land in 1679.

3. The will of John Washington, on record in Westmoreland County, devised in 1686 his share of the above land to his son, Lawrence Washington.

4. The division of the above land, 5000 acres, between Spenser and Washington in 1690, is on record in the County of Stafford, and we find Augustine Washington, son of this Lawrence Washington, in possession of one half of the above 5000 acres in 1740. The "Survey and division between Spenser and Washington, September and December, 1690"—the title endorsed on the instrument in the handwriting of George Washington—stating the terms of division of the 5000 acres purchased in 1679, by John Washington and Nicholas Spenser, is in the possession of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union, the eldest son of John Augustine Washington having sold the estate to this Association.

5. A deed from Augustine Wash-

ington, conveying said 2500 acres to his son, Lawrence Washington, recorded at a session of the General Court of Virginia, held at the Capital, October 28, 1740.

6. The will of Augustine Washington confirming the above deed of 1740 recorded in King George County, May, 1743.

7. The will of Lawrence Washington, made in 1752, devising the said 2500 acres (called by him "Mount Vernon") to his daughter for her life, and after her death to his younger half-brother, George Washington, probated in Fairfax County, November 26, 1752. Under this will, the daughter having died in infancy, George Washington became the owner of Mount Vernon.

8. The will of George Washington devising Mount Vernon and about 4000 acres to his nephew, Bushrod Washington, on record about 1800 in Fairfax County.

9. The will of Bushrod Washington, devising Mount Vernon and the lands (by old survey amounting to 1225 acres) to his nephew, John A. Washington, on record in Fairfax County, 1829 or 1830.

10. The will of John A. Washington devising all his property to his wife, Jane C. Washington, during her widowhood, with the power to devise it as she pleased among his children, on record in Jefferson County (formerly Virginia, now West Virginia), 1842.

11. A deed from Mrs. Jane C. Washington, widow of John A. Washington, to her late husband's oldest son, John A. Washington, conveying to him (under the power of appointment given her by her husband's will) Mount Vernon and 1220 acres attached to it—on record in Fairfax County, 1850.

12. The will of Mrs. Jane C. Washington, widow of John Washington, devising Mount Vernon to her husband's

aforesaid son, John A. Washington, confirming the deed she had already made to him—on record in Jefferson County (formerly Virginia, now West Virginia), 1855.

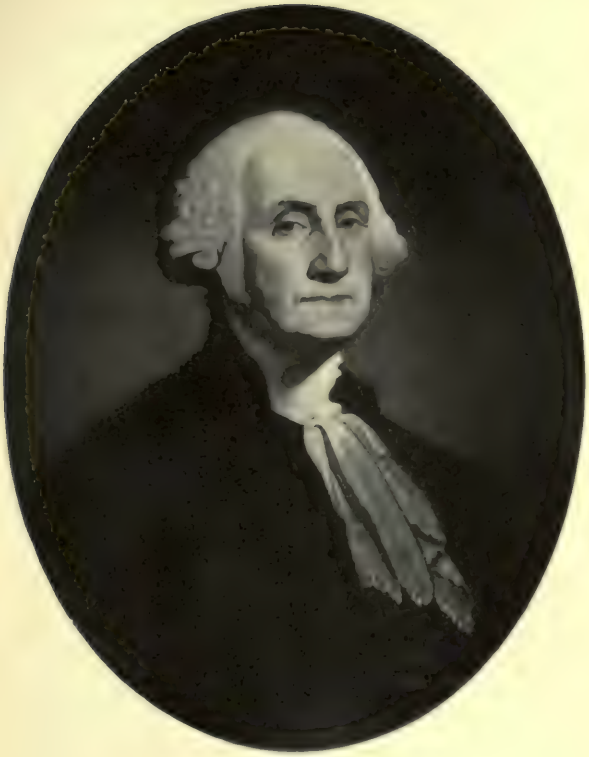
13. A contract between John A. Washington and the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union (a corporation chartered under Act of the Legislature of Virginia, passed March 19, 1858) for the purchase of 202 acres of the above land, on record in Fairfax County, April 6, 1858.

14. A deed dated the 12th day of November, 1858, made in pursuance of the contract previously cited, by W. A. Taylor, Commissioner, and the heirs of John A. Washington, conveying to the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association the Mount Vernon buildings and tombs, with 202 acres of land.

15. As to a part of the estate, a deed of the 23rd of July, 1887, from J. Gould and wife, conveying to the

Mount Vernon Ladies' Association an adjoining parcel of 33½ acres, being a part of the original Mount Vernon estate, which was conveyed to J. Gould by a deed from Lawrence Washington and wife simultaneously with the execution of the deed of Gould and wife to the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, the said Lawrence Washington having inherited this tract of 33½ acres from his father, John A. Washington.

This is the unbroken chain by which the legal title to Mount Vernon, at the time when the estate was about to be lost forever to the people of the country, became vested in the patriotic Association known as the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union, who hold it under the laws of Virginia, as a trust "Sacred to the memory of George



*George Washington*

Washington." But the mere recorded title gives little idea of the wonderful struggle made by those through whose tireless zeal and unending efforts the estate was finally reposed and preserved in the hands of this unique body of guardians, or of the devotion, fidelity, and taste with which they have executed their trust.[1]

To attempt any adequate description of Mount Vernon or of Washington's personal association with his beloved home would far exceed the limits of

[1] The foregoing account of the title of the most interesting of all American homes, is taken from the able and careful report made in 1901 by the Virginia Board of Visitors to Mount Vernon for that year, to the Honorable J. Hoge Tyler, Governor of Virginia. This report, containing as it does the result of the laborious investigation made at that time, gives in succinct and accurate form the history of the title to the estate, and of its government by the present owners, and to this work the present writer refers his readers and desires to acknowledge in the fullest possible way his indebtedness for the greater portion of this paper.

this paper. It is more than probable that Washington was the only man on American soil who could have brought the Revolutionary War to a triumphant conclusion. It is as certain as anything in history can be, that without Washington the history of this nation and the history of representative government and of Liberty throughout the world would have been different from what it is. But further, it is more than possible, that without Mount Vernon Washington himself might not have been precisely what he was. That unique balance of power that differentiates him from all other men of all times might not have existed but for the conditions in which it had its growth and ultimate maturity. In all the years of his activity, so fateful to mankind, beginning as it were with

his very boyhood, who may tell what part in the mighty result was due to the simplicity, quietude, and dignity of this country place, so persuasive of reflection and so inspiring to high thought, seated as it is on the bluff overlooking the broad and tranquil river with its ever changing face and its never changing flow. From the time when, as a stalwart lad he first became an inmate of his older brother's beautiful home and saw fit to take time to write down "Rules for Behavior in Company and Conversation," down to the eve of the day when, with a fame greater than that of any man in the world, his ashes were laid to rest at his request within the beloved precincts of his grounds, Mount Vernon cast its influence over his life and was the object of his unceasing affection. He

received it not by inheritance, but as a gift from his older half-brother as a token of gratitude for the affection which had led him to go as his companion and nurse to Barbadoes and the Bermudas, during the former's decline. And curiously enough, from this time, during all the years that it remained in the Washington family the place never passed by inheritance, but always by gift or devise, to the next possessor.

Finally, as we have seen, Mount Vernon passed into the possession of Mr. John Augustine Washington, a grand-nephew of Bushrod Washington, and, like many of the old Virginia seats, the revenues from it were unequal to the demands made on it. Agricultural conditions were changing rapidly. The land at Mount Vernon, never very rich, was steadily growing less fertile.

The development of the great estates in the South and the opening up of the rich regions beyond the Ohio and the Mississippi brought a change of conditions, with which Virginia could not compete successfully. The key in which the life of the country gentry was cast was one which called for a large expenditure. The rule was to keep open house for all who came. The hospitality was of the abounding kind. No class of men ever had greater calls made on their generosity or responded more graciously, and when to the customary demand was added, in this case, that which sprang from the position of Mount Vernon as the most noted and most visited country seat on the continent, the exactions were far more than any private fortune in Virginia could support. Thus, Mount

Vernon gradually began to "go down" as the expressive phrase runs, and no zeal of the master, however patriotic and filial, was equal to its preservation. Doubtless, of all who deplored the fact, none deplored it so much as he, and no chapter in the history of the estate is more moving than that in which the country gentleman on whose shoulders rested the burden and responsibility of preserving the estate, in a manner befitting its fame, strove to bear them. The same exactions had reduced Jefferson from affluence to poverty, as far less exactions had impoverished less well known men, masters of other and less well known estates.

Both the United States and the State of Virginia had the chance to become the owner of Mount Vernon, and

both declined it, not once but several times; and both failed to avail themselves of the opportunity.

John A. Washington, the elder, the nephew of Bushrod and the uncle of the grantor to the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, foreseeing the difficulty of a private individual's keeping up the estate and preserving it in a manner commensurate with the dignity of its associations, added a codicil to his will on July 8, 1830, providing for the disposal of the place to the United States, should the Congress desire to possess it. Nothing, however, came of this proposal, and later on his immediate successor and namesake, recognizing the drift of the times and seeing the impossibility of keeping up the estate, made another attempt to place it beyond the danger

of destruction by proposing to dispose of it to either the State of Virginia or the United States Government. Negotiations had been attempted with the owner from various directions with a view to purchasing the estate, by persons who foresaw that such a deal might subsequently prove remunerative to them, but all such offers, naturally, were promptly rejected. The rumor, however, having got abroad that speculative persons were desirous of availing themselves of the difficulties that beset the owner of the estate, the Governor of Virginia, the Honorable Joseph Johnson, on December 5, 1853, transmitted to the General Assembly of the State an earnest recommendation that the State of Virginia should purchase the property from its owner. His message upon this subject is as follows:

*Martha Washington*

I cannot refrain from respectfully and earnestly recommending to the Legislature the propriety of the purchase of Mount Vernon by the State of Virginia, and I do so at this time more particularly, as there is reason to apprehend that it is about to pass into the hands of strangers. The importance of the acquisition of this property by the United States has frequently been brought to the attention of Congress, and it is surprising that this commendable project has met with so little favor. For this we should ever feel thankful, because if once the property of the Federal Government, we might never have been able to purchase it. This should never be. Whilst we might reasonably prefer that it should be the property of the Union, rather than belong to any private individual, yet Virginia, and she only, should be the owner and have control of this sacred spot, where rest the

mortal remains of her immortal son. Who else but Virginia should own this hallowed spot, and guard and protect the grave of him whose name will be revered as long as one shall live to admire American liberty?—and should some ruthless hand ever disturb the sepulchre of the honored dead, or even change the primitive simplicity of his former residence, a sense of shame would come over every Virginian, and he would feel that that had been a loss which could not be estimated in dollars and cents. If it can be purchased, then, upon fair and reasonable terms, let us do it at once, that we may preserve it in its primitive simplicity and beauty, to be freely resorted to by all admirers of true greatness and human liberty, and be gazed on by all who pass upon the beautiful Potomac.

Considering the character of him whose name has thrown this halo of glory around the spot, and in view of

the fact that, foremost as usual in whatever was good and great, he presided over the first agricultural society that ever met in Virginia, I do not know that the property could be more appropriately disposed of than to convert it into a model farm, and establish upon it a State agricultural school. If this disposition should not meet with your approbation, then it might be well to consider the propriety of establishing there a literary institution of some kind upon a different basis; the first object, however, should be the acquisition of the property.

The General Assembly took up the matter seriously; for all felt the need of preserving the place hallowed by such memories.

On December 17th, that portion of the Governor's message relative to the purchase of Mount Vernon was, on

motion, referred to a committee of five, with instructions to inquire into the expediency of purchasing the same on behalf of the State. Also to inquire as to the price and terms upon which such purchase might be negotiated, and as to what disposition should be made of this sacred homestead of our illustrious patriot if it should be found expedient for the State to purchase the same. This committee immediately began a correspondence with Mr. John A. Washington, the owner of Mount Vernon, informing him of the purpose of their organization and solicited a free communication of his views on the subject. In reply, dated the 31st of December, Mr. Washington expressed his willingness to alien the property to the State, and proposed definite terms on which he

was disposed to transfer the property. The committee suggested, in return, a modification of his terms; but the negotiation failed and the committee, on the 3d of March, 1854, reported its failure and expressed regret that they had not been able to see the propriety under the conditions of the State's finances, of recommending the acquisition of the property on the terms proposed, whereupon they were, on their request, discharged from further consideration of the subject.

In view of the failure of both the National Government and of Virginia to avail themselves of the opportunity to become the owner of Mount Vernon, the danger became imminent that in no long time it might pass into the hands of strangers, who might possibly speculate on the fame of the greatest citizen

of all time. It was at this time that Providence appears to have pointed the way to its preservation by the only means which possibly would have saved it—the devotion of the women of the country. A movement was set on foot by patriotic ladies to save this precious home as the shrine and heritage of all Americans, which resulted, after long years of heroic effort and self-denial, in the present happy condition, where it is held by the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union. The story of this movement reads like a romance.

It was the custom for steamboats plying along the Potomac to toll their bells as they passed Mount Vernon. The custom had begun when the death of the Father of his Country on that December night, at the very close of the

last century, had plunged the nation in grief, and had been continued reverently ever since. It was known all over the country. It is probable that no wayfarer ever passed along the river without being solemnized by this tribute of national respect; and but few passed who failed to reflect that in the course of time and before very long, the home of Washington would be subdivided and pass into the hands of strangers. Possibly the wish entered many hearts that this impending fate might be averted and the home of Washington be spared to show to future generations what it was when Washington consecrated it with his presence. But of all the multitude that passed by no one appears to have done more than wish for its preservation, until one moonlit night in 1853.

In South Carolina, the land of sentiment, dwelt Mrs. Robert Cunningham, who had been born in Alexandria, Va., six years before the death of Washington, and whose father and grandfather were vestrymen with George Washington, of old Christ Church in Alexandria. She came of a family noted for its patriotism, and two of her aunts had married distinguished Pennsylvanians: one of them James Wilson and the other George Ross, both signers of the Declaration of Independence. She was the mother of several children, among them a young daughter, by name Ann Pamela, who, from her childhood, was the victim of some spinal trouble, which eventually made her a hopeless invalid and confined her to her couch. During the early childhood of this

*Ann Pamela Cunningham*

daughter, Mrs. Cunningham, on one occasion during a trip North, spent a week at Mount Vernon with her two children, one of whom was Ann Pamela, then but a few years old. Many years afterward as Mrs. Cunningham was on her way to Philadelphia to place her invalid daughter under the care of a noted physician, in passing Mount Vernon on the boat, as the bell tolled she realized the full import of the situation, and she communicated to her daughter the idea that other means of preserving the home of Washington for the country having failed, the women of the country should take the matter in hand and preserve it.

Fired with this suggestion, Miss Ann Pamela Cunningham from her invalid chair conceived, projected, and, against all obstacles, carried through to

triumphant success the lofty and comprehensive plan which, after years of endeavor and toil not only secured the preservation of Mount Vernon for the people of this country, but saved it in the best way it could have been saved. For she placed it under the law, in the faithful custody of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association,—an Association probably better constituted to keep this national treasure of patriotic sentiment national, and at the same time close to the hearts of the people, than any other imaginable organization could have been. The great idea suggested to the invalid lady by her mother appears to have taken immediate and absolute possession of her. "I will do it" was her instant decision, and she set herself promptly to the task. Her friends and relatives

endeavored to dissuade her from her purpose. It was an impossible undertaking they argued, her strength was not equal to it and in truth it must have appeared so to those who knew the frail invalid stretched on her couch. But in that feeble frame was encased a bold and aspiring spirit, a soul equal to any undertaking—type of the kind that have carried the Anglo-Saxon civilization to the forefront and declared its base to be devotion to virtue, public and private.

Her first step was a proof that she possessed a clear and comprehensive intellect. It was the recognition of the great fact, unknown to many women and to nearly all men at that time, that the women of the country possessed a vast store of energy and ability, undeveloped and unused. This she would

call into exercise and employ. Having formulated her plan, that the women of America should purchase and preserve the home of Washington, she set to work with courage, wisdom, and devotion.

On the 3d of December, 1853, two days before the date of Governor Johnson's message to the Legislature of Virginia, recommending that Virginia purchase and save the home of Washington, she issued her first appeal to the women of the country, urging upon them the high duty of raising a fund to preserve the home of Washington. And, as it was deemed improper for a lady to take part in public affairs, she used the nom-de-plume, "A Southern Matron," a term which became widely known in the sequel. At first, it appears that this appeal was

made only to the women of the South; but this naturally drew forth the protest from women in other parts of the Union that "whatever else was sectional Washington belonged to the whole country." This view Miss Cunningham was prompt to accept, and the appeal was quickly made to embrace the entire body of American women.

The first public meeting to raise funds appears to have been held on the 22d of February, 1854, in Laurens, S. C., Miss Cunningham's home. At this meeting, $293.75 was raised, the first fruit of the great movement inaugurated by her. The next organized meeting would appear to have been held in Richmond, Va., on the evening of July 12, 1854, when about thirty ladies assembled for the purpose of forming an Association to raise money

to aid in purchasing Mount Vernon, to be held in trust by the Governor of Virginia and his successors. This meeting was attended by a number of distinguished gentlemen, including Governor Johnson, who in a brief address to them referred to the unsuccessful effort in which he had taken part, when a member of Congress, to induce the United States Government to purchase Mount Vernon, as well as to the failure of the Legislature of Virginia to take over the place, and of various other movements having in view the same object.

On the assembling of the Virginia Legislature the next winter, Governor Johnson, in his annual message of December 3, 1855, again referred to his former recommendation, which he substantially repeated, and alluded to the

fact that however ready Virginia might be to purchase and pay for the hallowed shades and sacred relics of Mount Vernon, that honor had been partially wrested from her, and had been "reserved for the noble purpose of adorning the brow of female philanthropy." He reported that the Mount Vernon Association of Ladies had been zealously engaged in the collecting of funds, and that "they magnanimously claimed the honor," he states, "of paying the purchase money, and, with becoming modesty, requested the General Assembly to authorize the purchase in the name of the Commonwealth, so that the title may be vested in Virginia and the property be under their control and direction, with the assurance to all that the sacred repository of the mighty dead will be forever kept from pollution."

Upon this recommendation, on the 14th of December, 1855, a committee on the purchase of Mount Vernon by the State of Virginia was appointed, and a bill was reported on January 10, 1856, authorizing the purchase of Mount Vernon with 200 acres of land, including the mansion, tomb, garden, grounds, and wharf of Mount Vernon, and was passed on the 17th of March, 1856, with only two votes against it. Underlying much of the secret hostility, was the opposition to any plan of so far-reaching a scope being conducted by a woman. The proposal was ridiculed as chimerical, and resisted as unwise, a term broad enough to embrace all conceivable objections. Letters were written against the work that had been undertaken and the promoters became the objects not only

*West Front of Mansion*

of derision but almost of obloquy. The objection to women "mixing in public affairs" soon aroused strong hostility to the idea, and later a distinguished editor and member of Congress entered the lists in ardent opposition, for the purpose of defeating the bill which had been introduced in the General Assembly of Virginia to effectuate and carry out the purpose of the Association which Miss Cunningham's genius had called into being. But a stronger force than that of any man or group of men had been enlisted, the force of the aroused interest of the women of the country—aroused by a lofty and unselfish sentiment, and, under this creative power a public opinion was being formed which swept over all opposition and carried Miss Cunningham's plan to a triumphant conclusion.

Associations were formed in State after State and contributions began to pour in from all sides. Possibly the one most important ally among the men who came to the aid of the ladies in their pious work was secured when Miss Cunningham in March, 1856, in furtherance of her plan, having travelled to Richmond in great suffering, met Edward Everett, who had gone there to deliver his renowned eulogy on Washington. Her unselfish zeal and patriotism and her inspiring devotion to the task to which she had set herself, made such an impression on Mr. Everett, then regarded as possibly the first orator of the country, that he dedicated thenceforth the proceeds of his lecture to her pious enterprise, and, in the sequel, contributed to the fund from his receipts the munificent

sum of $69,964; but even more than this was the aid he furnished by becoming Miss Cunningham's most earnest and most eloquent champion.

From this it will be seen that the first idea of Miss Cunningham was to have the women of the country raise the fund for the purchase of the place, but for the place itself to be conveyed to the State of Virginia in a form which would have made the State the absolute owner. Very little success, however, appears to have attended the attempt to carry out this plan. The class to whom the appeal was made was not interested in purchasing property and donating it to the State of Virginia. The point was naturally made that, if the State of Virginia desired to become the owner of Washington's home, she should appropriate

the money to pay for it. In this state of the case the views of Miss Cunningham, who was the leading spirit in the entire movement, underwent a change; and, undaunted by her first failure, she conceived the idea of having the women of the country not only raise the money for the purchase of Mount Vernon, but hold it themselves in trust for the people of the country, and to this end she now addressed herself.

It would be an interesting as well as a curious study to go into the obstacles encountered by Miss Cunningham and those who united with her in the work of carrying out her plan to completion. To add to the difficulties of raising the fund necessary to secure Mount Vernon, came the great panic of 1857 which caused a pall of financial distress to

fall over the whole country. In the midst of this came, like a thunderclap, the announcement that Mr. Washington found the obstacles in the way of his transferring the estate under the new plan proposed insuperable. He could not bring himself to transfer the property to any purchaser except the State of Virginia. All the efforts which had been made by the women of the country and their friends appeared to have been thrown away. Even the integrity of the Association was attacked by the press. Mr. Washington was criticised and angered. Contributions ceased. The cause appeared absolutely and hopelessly lost. One more effort was made in the House of Delegates in Virginia to induce the General Assembly to meet the situation by issuing bonds for

$200,000, the amount asked, and become the purchaser, looking to reimbursement later on at the hands of the women of the country. It was explained that Mr. Washington, the proprietor of Mount Vernon, had absolutely refused to sell the estate or any portion of it unless the State of Virginia became the purchaser. The bill, however, thus introduced, failed on a vote of 39 Ayes to 57 Noes; whereupon the mover of the bill, Mr. Chapman, stated that he would later on offer a substitute, a mere act of incorporation of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, to which there could be no objection. Accordingly, on the 19th of March, 1858, an act of incorporation of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association was passed by both houses of the General Assembly of Virginia,

under which this Association received and now holds the title to the hallowed shades and sacred relics of Mount Vernon. This title is indefeasible except by the Association's ceasing to exist, or failing to perform its trust of preserving the place sacred to the Father of his Country. In such case the place reverts to the State of Virginia, and the Governor of Virginia appoints annually five visitors to Mount Vernon, to represent the interest of the State therein.

In the critical juncture referred to, when Mount Vernon appeared irretrievably lost, Miss Cunningham displayed new powers. She proved, as was well said by Mr. Chapman, that where faith is placed in the assurance of the ladies, what they engage to do will be done, and "a man with his puny

arms might as well attempt to pluck roses from the shrubbery of the moon as to attempt to thwart their resolution." Confined to her couch, a hopeless invalid, Miss Cunningham could not travel by train save for the shortest distance, but she could travel by boat, and she determined to see Mr. Washington herself, and endeavor to induce him to retire from his resolution. In pursuance of this determination she painfully made the journey from Charleston to Baltimore by boat, and thence to Mount Vernon.

She was hospitably received, but her arguments and expostulations alike failed to move Mr. Washington from a position founded on sentiment. She was borne in her chair back to the landing to take the boat, but providentially the boat had left, and, after

*The Old Barn*

waiting for some time in the stream, in a skiff, for the mail-boat, she was compelled to return and take refuge for the night at Mount Vernon. The accident thought so disastrous at the moment proved to be providential.

In the pleasant intercourse of the family circle that evening, Miss Cunningham learned the secret of Mr. Washington's opposition. He had received the impression that the General Assembly of the State and the Ladies' Association had united to reflect on him. She was fortunately able to remove the impression, declaring that the ladies fully appreciated the fact that the charter proposed was not acceptable to him, and that she would do all in her power to secure one that was. To her joy, the following morning she discovered that her indo-

mitable devotion had so impressed him, that he had come around to her point of view, and that the day was won.

But then began another struggle. Under the chilling influence of disappointment, ardor had died out. It was hard to relight the old fires, and it required another period of anxiety and toil before enthusiasm could be rekindled. But the spirit of woman was equal to the task. All over the country they were working and inspiring others to take up the task. Miss Hamilton in New York, through her efforts, raised about one fifth of the fund needed; Mrs. Greenough in Massachusetts, aided by Mrs. Ritchie of Virginia, who went there to give readings for the cause, did her great share; Miss Macalister of Pennsylvania secured general subscriptions—and so, in State

after State Associations were formed to carry on the work of love and patriotism.

When at length all difficulties were removed and all legal requirements were met with, and the final act was necessary to pass the title that should transfer Mount Vernon into the pious care of those whose zeal and patriotism had provided for its permanent preservation for the whole people of the country and for all lovers of liberty the world over; the strain had been so great on the devoted woman who had given her life to this cause, that she fell into a physical collapse, and it was feared that the breath might forsake her exhausted body before she was able to sign the document necessary to complete the great transaction. She had to be lifted up by Mrs. Ritchie,

who was with her, and the pen placed in her nervous hand as though she were a dying woman. She could write only a few letters at a time, but finally the signature was affixed, the long struggle was ended, and the home of Washington was placed, at last, in the custody of those faithful women who had saved it, as trustees, for posterity.

The contract under which the Association became the owners of Mount Vernon, was signed April 6, 1858.

Thus, we have seen that the present owners of Mount Vernon not only became such at the cost of great toil and sacrifice, when both the State and Federal authorities declined to intervene—for what appeared to them, and probably rightly, sound reasons; but, by this toil and sacrifice they

rescued it from probable destruction, and restored it and preserved it for the people of the country as nearly as possible as it was when Washington consecrated it with his presence. And it is, moreover, probable that this Association is the only one who might have been able to preserve it in such form. It has been seen that the Governor of Virginia, in his message, suggested that, in order to preserve it, it might be necessary to utilize it as a model farm or at least as an educational institution of some kind, and no one can tell in what form it might have been preserved at the hands of any Government, whether State or Federal.

The chief beauties of the work of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, after the fact of its nationally patriotic character, are:

First: That they have restored and preserved for posterity this precious old colonial home precisely as it was in Washington's day; so that when all other seats of great men shall have yielded to the change of fashion, this shall remain as it was when Washington ennobled it by his presence. Here future generations shall come and discover that neither grandeur nor splendor are needed for greatness. Secondly: That all that has been accomplished by them has been done from motives of the purest patriotism and the loftiest sentiment, with no other reward to themselves than that which comes to high minded women from the consciousness of performing duty and making sacrifices for the object of their purest affection. Except for the reasonable sums paid the superintendent of

*Out-Buildings*

the grounds and buildings and to the caretakers under his charge, not a cent comes to them in any manner, directly or indirectly, or is applied otherwise than to the maintenance and preservation of the place. No one in the Association receives any salary whatever. Their sole reward is having preserved Mount Vernon, "sacred to the memory of the Father of his Country."

In proof of the appreciation of the sacredness of the spot is the fact that during the War no act of vandalism was committed there by either side. Colonel Upton Herbert, a Virginian, placed there by the Association, remained on the spot undisturbed. Passes were given to the Regents to visit the place when no other persons could pass through the lines. The

members of contending armies on approaching its precincts sounded a truce, and, stacking arms outside, trod the hallowed ground with reverent feet. It testifies alike to the wisdom with which the first Regent had laid out her plan to make this a trust for all Americans, and to the faith with which it had been carried out.

In brief, Miss Cunningham's plan for the preservation and government of Mount Vernon was to have a body of Regents composed of ladies representing every State in which any part was taken in the movement inaugurated by her; these ladies to elect from their number a President, who should be known as the Regent, while the rest of them should be called Vice-Regents. In pursuance of this plan there are now Vice-Regents from the States of Ala-

bama, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia. There have been, within the fifty odd years that have elapsed since the organization came into being, only four Regents. First, the founder, Miss Ann Pamela Cunningham of South Carolina, who presided from 1853 to 1873, the year before her death, when she resigned on account of her incapacity longer to perform her duties; secondly, Mrs. Lily M. Berghman of Pennsylvania, who presided from 1874 until her

death in 1891; thirdly, Mrs. Justine Van Renssalaer Townsend of New York, who presided until 1909, when, fourthly, Miss Harriet C. Comegys of Delaware was chosen and is now Regent.

To get a true idea of the work of the Association, one should see them at work. The earnest zeal, the refined taste, the pious service with which every step is taken, speak alike for the wisdom with which the plan was first conceived and the continued inspiration with which it has been carried on through the years.

The raising of the fund of $200,000 which was the original price paid for the estate, was far from all which the Regents had to do. The place at the time of its purchase was in a dilapidated condition, due to causes which have

*Walk to River*

already been stated. The Regents of the Association set before themselves the task of restoring the place, as near as possible, to the condition in which it was during Washington's lifetime, and thus to preserve it. It was necessary to rebuild out-buildings which had perished; to construct a sea-wall to protect the front lawn with its fine trees, from the erosion of the tides which were steadily undermining the bluffs, and especially to preserve the tomb from the effects of damp.

To meet the situation it was necessary to raise over and above the amount of the purchase price, funds sufficient for this purpose and to maintain it in the future. As a part of their plan they proposed to secure the return, if possible, of such relics connected with Washington and Mount Vernon as might be

found scattered throughout the country, and of all articles of furniture which had been there in Washington's life-time, and this was to be done in such a way as to emphasize the character of the place as a home and avoid as far as possible the characteristics of a museum. How they have succeeded in their pious task let the multitude of pilgrims say, who daily repair with reverent feet and sobered minds to this shrine of American liberty.

Unfortunately, a great many articles, including almost the entire library of Washington, were placed beyond the hope of recovery, having been secured by other public institutions or being in the possession of those who were unwilling to part with such precious relics. But many things have been recovered and as the years pass others

likewise will be restored to Mount Vernon. One absolute rule has been adopted, and wisely. Nothing has been accepted, even though offered as a gift with the best motives, which did not relate to Washington or Mount Vernon, and the greatest care has been exercised to prevent imposition even by those who believed most firmly in the authenticity of relics. Nor has this been accomplished without much difficulty, care, and resolution, and from time to time criticism, based sometimes upon hostility, has been levelled at them. From time to time, indeed, a movement appears to try and wrest from their hands this precious relic of Washington, based generally upon the shrewd contention that Washington's home should belong to the Government; with the fact that an

admission charge is made to visitors, as a weapon against them. Such a movement was started with so much apparent determination some thirty years ago that the Regents deemed it necessary to seek the advice of counsel. They consulted such eminent lawyers and judges as the late Hons. Reverdy Johnson, John Randolph Tucker, Richard T. Merrick, Thomas Durfee, and J. P. Comegys, all of whom, without consultation among themselves, concurred in the view that their title was complete and irrefragable. In the course of his opinion, which was laid before the authorities of the State of Virginia, Mr. Reverdy Johnson declared the pregnant and incontrovertible fact that, however veiled and concealed, under all of these attempts to assail the present method of conducting

Mount Vernon, was to be found, invariably, the effort of some private individual or association of persons who desire to exploit Mount Vernon and the fame of him who made it sacred, for private purposes of making money out of them.

It is believed that the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union is the first body comprised exclusively of ladies, ever incorporated to conduct so national and far-reaching an enterprise, and the Association having conducted it with signal success, wisdom, and taste, it is not likely that, even though the attempt be made, which is not probable, the women of the country will ever allow the management of the place so honorable to them to be wrested from those who have shed so much lustre on them.

There are in all about thirty buildings on the Mount Vernon estate: the mansion, office, kitchen, butler's house, gardener's house, carpenter shop, spinning-house, smoke-house, wagon-shed, summer-house, spring-house, milk-house, shelter-house in deer park, servants' quarters — two houses, — a corn house, laundry, coach-house; north gate—two lodge-houses, pavilion on wharf for passengers, seven cabins for employees; west gate — two lodge-houses and a barn. All of these have been restored and put in perfect condition.

The mansion at Mount Vernon is a simple structure of wood, two and a half stories in height painted on the outside to resemble stone, built on colonial lines, in the dignified and harmonious form impressive in its very

simplicity. The main building is some 96 feet in length by 47 feet in depth. Along its entire front runs a broad portico 25 feet in height, with square pillars. Curving back from the river at either end are colonnades connecting it with the offices and out-buildings.

Fronting the mansion are shaded lawns, and below is the deer park, occupying about 20 acres. In the rear are lawns, gardens, and orchards. About 150 acres are in woodland and about 70 acres are utilized for farming operations on a moderate scale. The income available for the preservation of the estate is derived mainly from the admission fee, which is esteemed by the Regents, not as a charge, but rather as a method of extending the privilege of aiding in the preservation of Mount Vernon to all who may care to visit

there. This fee is fixed at twenty-five cents, the sum agreed on when the first act was passed by the Virginia Legislature in 1855, and was adopted not merely as the chief means of preserving the estate, but as a means of protecting it against the danger of its becoming the common resort for those whose presence might endanger the property. This income, though considerable, is not sufficient even when added to the interest on the inadequate endowment fund, to keep up the place and make such restorations and improvements as from time to time appear necessary, and a number of the Regents have at times given or raised the required funds to meet the necessities of the case. Every endeavor has been made to preserve the mansion and its precious contents from fire. Not only is no fire permitted in

*Washington's Bedroom*

the mansion itself, but all smoking is prohibited on the grounds. As a safeguard against the danger of fire, the Association has introduced a hot-water plant, not liable to explosion, overheating, or charring of woodwork, the boilers being installed outside at a safe distance from the mansion. With a view to further protection, a modern chemical fire apparatus has been installed, and watchmen are always pacing their beats night and day.

In the mansion there are nineteen rooms and four or five closets or small rooms. The Vice-Regents of the Association have to some extent divided among themselves the care of the various apartments of the mansion. All have worked together with harmony and with equal devotion to the one purpose of preserving Mount Vernon as a trust

sacred to the memory of Washington.

No better evidence of the spirit which has animated these devoted women can be given than the charge to them contained in the farewell addressed to them on her final retirement from the Regency by Miss Cunningham.

*To the Council of the Ladies' Mount Vernon Association of June, 1875.*

LADIES: It was my intention as well as my duty, to have met you at this time and conformed in person to the legal requisition accompanying a resignation so important as mine, but Providence does not permit.

But in parting I feel it due to you as to me; to the responsibilities I solemnly assumed, which were so important in their results; to those you have taken upon yourselves, to say a few words as to those responsibilities

or duties, laid down in the beginning of our work, not to be lightly regarded, for they were pledges to future generations as well as to ours. The minds and hearts which conceived the rescue of the home of Washington; of the completion of a worthy "tribute" to public integrity and private virtue; an expression of the gratitude due and felt by a country destined to act such an important part in the drama of the world; conceived it with all the reverence felt in older regions for the resting-place of their honored dead; where only pious hands are permitted to be in "charge" so as to have them carried down to admiring ages in the same conditions as when left.

Such was the pledge made to the American heart when an appeal was made to it to save the home and tomb of Washington, the Father of his Country, from all change, whether by law or desecration; such to the last

owner of Mount Vernon, ere he was willing to permit it to pass from his hands; such to the Legislature of his Mother State ere she gave us legal rights over it; such are we bound to keep. Our honor is concerned, as well as our intelligence and legal obligations. The mansion and the grounds around it should be religiously guarded from change—should be kept as Washington left them.

Ladies, the home of Washington is in your charge; see to it that you keep it the home of Washington. Let no irreverent hand change it; no vandal hands desecrate it with the changes of progress. Those who go to the home in which he lived and died wish to see in what he lived and died. Let one spot in this grand country of ours be saved from change. Upon you rests this duty.

When the centennial comes, bringing with it its thousands from the ends of

the earth, to whom the home of Washington will be the place of places in our country, let them see that, though we slay our forests, remove our dead, pull down our churches, remove from home to home, till the hearthstone seems to have no resting place in America; let them see that we do know how to care for the home of our hero. Farewell!

Ladies, I return to your hands the office so long held—since December 2d, 1853.

Respectfully,

ANN PAMELA CUNNINGHAM.

June 1, 1874.

It is no more than truth to say that those to whom this lofty appeal was addressed have kept their trust with the faith of the vestals of Rome.

Few persons realize how closely Mount Vernon was identified with

Washington's life. And without this one can scarcely wholly realize the complete lesson of the majestic simplicity of this most impressive tomb of mortal man.

The number of biographies of Washington that have been written almost exceed account, and they vary all the way from pictures so distorted as to be hardly worthy of contempt; and, in all of them which have the least claim to fidelity, the influence of Washington's home is felt. Nor could it help being so if one takes the least trouble to study the conditions amid which his powers sprung. Here he grew up from youth to manhood, fishing, swimming, roaming over the hills which he was later to own, reflecting, and writing down his reflections on Rules of Conduct; studying and practising survey-

*Martha Washington's Bedroom*

ing; hunting with an ardor and a bold horsemanship which, with his zeal and care as a surveyor, was to commend him to Lord Fairfax—himself a keen sportsman—and lay the foundation of his fortune. Here he had his early love affairs, and essayed the only rôle in which he failed: that of a poet. Here he learned the Gentleman's Art of Fence, from the two old campaigners, with whom he was later to have so sad an experience at "Fort Necessity." Hence he started forth on his early civil career as a young surveyor beyond the mountains. Hence he was summoned at the age of twenty-one to receive and bear the despatches of Governor Dinwiddie to the French post on the upper Ohio. Hence, a little later on, he set forth again to conduct the ill-starred expedition

which ended at Great Meadows; and to act as aide and guide for Braddock in his fatal campaign. Here, amid the gathering gloom of the impending cloud of revolution, he meditated on those mighty problems which were then agitating all serious minds and on whose solution depended the fate, possibly, of all mankind. At Mount Vernon he stood for the General Assembly of Virginia, where he was described by a friend, Mr. Atkinson, as "cool, like a Bishop at his prayers," and here he stood for Congress, moving steadily more and more to the front. It was after this election to the Continental Congress that Mr. Henry and Mr. Pendleton came by Mount Vernon to pick him up and ride to Philadelphia with him, and it was during their visit here that Mrs. Washington was quoted

*Nellie Custis's Bedroom*

by Pendleton as talking "like a Spartan mother to her son on going into battle," and hoping that "they would stand firm. She knew George would." It was here he later received the news of his appointment to the Command-in-Chief of the American forces, as, years after, he received the news of his nomination and later of his election as President of the great Republic he had done so much to make. It is said that he was absent from Mount Vernon for more than seven years during the Revolutionary War, without once returning home; but his letters show how present the place was ever in his thoughts. When, while at Boston licking his undisciplined and ragged troops into the shape of an army, the rumor reached him that his place was to be destroyed by Lord

Dunmore as an act of reprisal against the Rebel Commander-in-Chief, his mind was disturbed by his wife's situation, but it was untroubled by the danger to his home, as dearly as he loved it. He writes to his distant kinsman and manager, Lund Washington, and gives him directions about his estate, in words which Irving properly terms "noble." "Let the hospitality of the house in respect to the poor," he says, "be kept up. Let no one go away hungry. If any of this kind of people should be in want of corn, supply their necessaries, provided it does not encourage them in idleness, and I have no objection to your giving my money in charity to the amount of forty or fifty pounds a year when you think it well bestowed. What I mean by having no objection is,

that it is my desire that it should be done. You are to consider that neither myself nor my wife is in the way to do these good things."

Much later on when, in the spring of 1781, the affairs of the Republic appeared at their lowest ebb, and Arnold, commanding at Portsmouth, was ravaging the coast and the banks of the Virginia rivers; while Phillips was ravaging the regions lying along her interior waters, Lund Washington secured immunity for Mount Vernon by furnishing one of Phillips's warships with provisions, whereupon Washington wrote him a strong rebuke. "It would," he writes, "have been a less painful circumstance to me to have heard that in consequence of your non-compliance with their request, they had burned my house and laid my

plantation in ruins." But, whatever his own feelings were in this embarrassing situation, we may, at least at the end of this long time, rejoice that his agent had the address to save, not only for Washington but for posterity, this precious relic of the past. And when two years later, on Christmas eve, Washington having the day before, at Annapolis, resigned his commission into the hands of Congress, reached Mount Vernon, he too must have been grateful to God for the preservation of his home.

He expressed the hope that he might be allowed to "spend the remainder of his days in cultivating the affections of good men and in the practice of domestic virtues," and his letters to his old comrades in arms glow with the happiness of being once more at home.

But it was not to be. Very soon Mount Vernon began to attract visitors from all quarters. They were received in the frank country style of a quiet gentleman and his sensible wife, who, with easy graciousness, dispensed her unaffected hospitality, keeping her hands occupied and her mind tranquil, while she diligently plied her swift knitting needles, as was the custom of most Virginia matrons.

The knowledge of the exactions of his situation in having to entertain such a flood of visitors, led the Supreme Council of Pennsylvania to instruct their delegates in Congress to call the attention of that body to the extraordinary expense entailed upon him, with a view to producing some national reward for his eminent services. Before proceeding further, however, a

copy of these instructions was sent to Washington for his approbation, but the suggestion was gratefully and respectfully declined; Washington, as Irving says, "jealously maintaining the satisfaction of having served his country at the sacrifice of his private interests."

The limits of this paper will not admit of further relation in detail of the later summons which came to him to surrender his retirement, for the good of the country; or of the great and decisive part he bore in the tremendous struggle which was yet before him, and in harmonizing the conflicting interests of the new and sovereign States to which his genius had recently given self-government and liberty. Washington's influence was the one thing felt by all; his wisdom and character almost

the one national asset in which all claimed a part. Here at Mount Vernon was the single centre to which all looked with equal affection. His home became the headquarters of the great forces of union and peace, as his tent had been the headquarters of war. Counselling, arguing, urging, chiding, beseeching, he spread abroad the national spirit until it covered the land, and the great victory was won in the achievement of a National Constitution.

The natural result was, of course, that he was called from his retirement to take his place and guide the frail bark, just launched, through the tumultuous seas which still threatened her instant destruction.

An entry in his diary, dated the 16th of April, 1789, says:

About 10 o'clock I bade adieu to Mount Vernon, to private life, and to domestic felicity; and with a mind oppressed with more anxious and painful sensations than I have words to express, set out for New York with the best disposition to render service to my country in obedience to its call, but with less hope of answering its expectations.

The great work he performed during the following eight years, the method he adopted in bringing about him the many great men of divergent and often fiercely hostile views, such, for example, as Jefferson and Hamilton, and inducing them all to work for the common good, until out of contrary elements he had brought a stable and abiding Nation and Government, though one of the mightiest tasks any

man has ever accomplished, is foreign to the scope of this sketch. Throughout it all, his thoughts ever turned to his beloved home, and in the hour of his greatest triumph his heart sighed for the sweet retirement of Mount Vernon.

His return to Mount Vernon at the close of his second administration was like a triumphant progress. Towns and villages united in doing him honor, but when he arrived at home he instantly merged into a private gentleman, and he who had influenced the destinies of the world and established a new form of government for mankind, gave himself up to, and thereby forever ennobled the calling of, a simple planter. He expressed his hope that the remainder of his life might be occupied in the amusement of agricultural and rural pursuits, and his expectation

never thenceforth to go more than twenty miles from his home.

We have a picture of his life at Mount Vernon at this time, given by himself in a letter to his friend James McHenry, Secretary of War.

I am indebted to you [he writes] for several unacknowledged letters, but never mind that; go on as if you had answers. You are the source of information, and can find many things to relate, while I have nothing to say that could either inform or amuse a Secretary of War in Philadelphia. I might tell him that I began my diurnal course with the sun; that, if my hirelings are not in their places at that time, I send them messages of sorrow for their indisposition; that having put these wheels in motion, I examine the state of things further; that the more they are probed the deeper I find the wounds which my buildings have sus-

*The Water Front*

tained by an absence and neglect of eight years; that by the time I have accomplished these matters, breakfast (a little after seven o'clock, about the time, I presume, you are taking leave of Mrs. McHenry) is ready; that, this being over, I mount my horse and ride around the farms; which employs me until it is time to dress for dinner, at which I rarely miss seeing strange faces, come, as they say, out of respect to me. Pray, would not the word curiosity answer as well? And how different this from having a few social friends at a cheerful board. The usual time of sitting at table, a walk, and tea brings me with the dawn of candle light; previous to which, if not prevented by company, I resolve that, as soon as the glimmering taper supplies the place of the great luminary, I will retire to my writing table and acknowledge the letters I have received; but when the lights are brought I feel

tired and disinclined to engage in this work, conceiving that the next night will do as well. The next night comes and with it the same causes for postponement, and so on. Having given you the history of a day, it will serve for a year, and, I am persuaded, you will not require a second edition of it. But it may strike you that in this detail no mention is made of any portion of time allotted for reading. The remark would be just, for I have not looked into a book since I came home; nor shall I be able to do it until I discharge my workmen; probably not before the lights grow longer, when possibly I may be looking in Doomsday Book.

The fame of its master brought to Mount Vernon at this time so continued a concourse of visitors that the strain on the host and hostess was becoming somewhat too heavy, and

Washington wrote and invited his nephew, Lawrence Lewis, to come and make his home with him and relieve him somewhat of the burden of hospitality.

Whenever it is convenient to you [he says] to make this place your home, I shall be glad to see you . . . . As both your aunt and I are in the decline of life, and regular in our habits, especially in our hours of rising and going to bed, I require some person (fit and proper) to ease me of the trouble of entertaining company, particularly of nights, as it is my inclination to retire (and unless prevented by very particular company, I always do retire) either to bed or to my study, soon after candle light. In taking those duties (which hospitality obliges me to bestow on company) off my hands it would render me a very acceptable service.

As might have been expected, the presence in the same house of the young aide-de-camp and of Miss Nellie Custis, Mrs. Washington's granddaughter who, with her brother, George Washington Parke Custis, had, on their father's death, been adopted by General Washington, resulted by a natural sequence in a romance, and they were married at Mount Vernon on the 22d of February, 1799, whereupon Washington arranged to settle them on a portion of the Mount Vernon lands which he had set apart in his will for the young lady.

He had not long to enjoy the society of the young married couple. Inured all his life to physical hardships and to outdoor life in all weathers, he did not comprehend fully that however robust his health may be, a man past sixty-

*Wedding Day of Nellie Custis*

seven, who has spent ten years of his life in the exhausting exactions of the closest, cannot endure what he might have stood with ease in his earlier life. A ride over his estates one winter morning, the 12th of December, continued for several hours in a storm which began with snow, passed into hail and "then turned into a settled cold rain," followed by an afternoon passed imprudently without changing his damp clothes, brought on the next day a deep cold and hoarseness, which settled in his throat and that night he was seized with a chill, followed by a violent attack, and he rapidly sank to his end before midnight the following night. Thus passed the physical life of the greatest man the world has yet known, leaving his memory for all men to revere and his home a shrine

for all men to honor. By his will he left to his dearly beloved wife, Martha Washington, the use, profit, and benefit of his whole estate, real and personal, for the term of her natural life, except certain parts which were especially disposed of otherwise, and at her death he left, as we have seen, to his nephew, Bushrod Washington, the greater part of Mount Vernon, including the mansion.

—Partly [he said], in consideration of an intimation to his deceased father, while we were bachelors and he had kindly undertaken to superintend my estate during my military service in the former War between Great Britain and France; that if I should fall therein, Mount Vernon, then less extensive in domain than at present, should become his property.

His body was laid to rest amid the

*Tomb of Washington*

lamentations of a people, in a spot which he had himself selected for his last repose, and there in a simplicity more majestic than the grandeur of the tomb of Napoleon under the mighty dome of the Invalides, his sacred ashes rest to-day, making a fitting shrine for him whose life was stamped with the simplicity of truth. The preservation of this shrine has been accomplished by the pious labors of the women of the country, and to them the country owes its gratitude. Here the representatives of the whole world come to do him honor, and as great soldiers learn in his campaign the highest lessons of the art of war, and great statesmen study in his life the yet higher lessons of the art of government, so they come to find in the simplicity of his home one of the great

secrets of noble living. Here they shall find the exact surroundings amid which Washington lived when at home; the noble simplicity of the home of the greatest man of all the ages.

THOMAS NELSON PAGE.

The first edition of Dr. Thomas Nelson Page's book on *Mount Vernon and Its Preservation* is issued by the generous donation of Mr. Charles N. Dietz, of Omaha, Nebraska, to whom I express the thanks of the Association.

REBEKAH S. MANDERSON,
*Of Committee on Publication.*

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